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SUBJECT: THE "PEACE AND ZEN" MAN: AN INSIDER'S TAKE ON
PRESIDENT GBAGBO

REF: A. ABIDJAN 197

[B](#). ABIDJAN 166

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: President Gbagbo's legal advisor (and goddaughter) reveals a different side of Cote d'Ivoire's most senior statesman and political figure, painting him as a man of "peace and zen" who prefers to focus on the intellectual, theoretical side of politics and leave the everyday matters of state management to his subordinates. END SUMMARY

[2](#). (C) Poloff had lunch with Geraldine Odehouri-Brou, President Gbagbo's legal advisor and goddaughter, on March [26](#). Brou, a young lawyer in her late thirties, was tapped to serve as the president's legal advisor two months after the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) was signed in March [2007](#). Her position was formerly occupied by Desire Tagro, who subsequently became Minister of Interior. Since May 2007, Brou has worked with President Gbagbo on a daily basis and has accompanied him to all international meetings on the peace process, including those facilitated by Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore. She also advises Gbagbo on texts, decrees, and political agreements - including revisions made to the OPA.

THOSE IN THE KNOW

[3](#). (C) Brou says Gbagbo has two circles of advisers: the inner circle -- and everyone else. His group of advisers as a whole is similar to "a mini Cote d'Ivoire," she said, with all ethnic groups, religions, and interest groups represented. When Gbagbo meets with his advisers to discuss their concerns, Brou says he usually listens as everyone thrashes out issues and then abruptly concludes meetings. During these sessions, he does not reveal his thoughts on the matters discussed or dictate how he would like issues to be resolved. Occasionally, a few weeks may even go by before Gbagbo will again discuss the issues raised in the meeting. When he does, however, his mind has usually been made up - much to the consternation of some of his advisers.

[4](#). (C) Brou says this style of presidential management "drives some of his advisers crazy," because extremely urgent and pressing issues are not immediately dealt with. Many advisers have tried to hurry the president along in making decisions - particularly when it comes to urgent, "burning" issues - to no avail. Brou attributes this to Gbagbo's personality: she calls him a "peace and zen" man who is unperturbed by urgency and the need to respond quickly in particular situations. The president prefers to take his own time to come to a decision, she says, and is often stubborn about following his advisers' recommendations. For this reason, Gbagbo has a reputation of "not listening to his advisers," says Brou.

MANAGING THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC

[5](#). (C) This belief (that advice falls on deaf ears) is not entirely deserved, says Brou. Gbagbo is just particularly intransigent on taking advice regarding matters that he deems to be of minor importance, she explained. For example,

Gbagbo has repeatedly rebuffed the advice of many of his advisers to have a full-time communications advisor (similar to Alain Lobognon in the Prime Minister's Office). Even when the press publishes negative stories, inaccuracies, or outright lies, Brou says that Gbagbo is not the slightest bit concerned and feels no need to respond publicly to explain his point of view. "He simply doesn't care when they print completely fabricated stories," she said.

¶16. (C) Gbagbo also feels little need to take full advantage of the press as a means of communicating with the public. Brou says the president prefers to speak to the press "only when he has resolved or concluded something" and feels there is little point in constantly explaining his position at every slight turn of events. For example, when the ComZone handover ceremony schedule for March 4 was postponed (reftel B), Gbagbo did not feel it was necessary to explain his version of why the event did not take place. He told Brou: "Why explain? The people obviously know the handover did not take place. I will speak when I have something to say."

¶17. (C) Although the president pays little attention to the press, however, this is not to say that he pays little attention to the public. The president is "brilliant" at deciphering the unique psychology of the Ivoirian people, says Brou, and has an extremely nuanced and intuitive understanding of what motivates, irritates, and moves his fellow countrymen.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

¶18. (C) Because Gbagbo has not taken more advantage of the press to explain his positions, however, Brou says the public and the international community have a very skewed view on how much power and influence he actually wields. Many events seemingly ordered by the president are not at all directed by the presidency, she says. For example, Brou said the president was unaware that the National Army (FANCI) had decided to detain Kobena Anaky for questioning after the small opposition party leader made inflammatory remarks on a national television program (reftel A). The president only learned about Anaky's detention after it had already taken place, and Brou says that FANCI did not consult with Gbagbo on the matter beforehand.

¶19. (C) Brou also cited the case of Nouveau Reveil journalist Nanankouah Gnamanteh, who is currently being tried for publishing a newspaper article critical of President Gbagbo. The president did not order Gnamanteh's arrest, Brou said; the public prosecutor took it upon himself to invoke legal proceedings against the journalist, whom he said had violated the penal code. Although Gbagbo was again urged by his advisers to publicly respond to these recent events (either by press release or interview), he did not feel it was necessary to do so.

MANAGING THE STATE, PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

¶10. (C) When it comes to managing his subordinates, Brou says that many of Gbagbo's advisers feel he is "too liberal" in his management style. Brou and other advisers find it frustrating that the president is a hands-off manager who leaves his subordinates alone until they give him a reason to step in and exert his authority. The president will only intervene, she says, when someone "really messes up and there is a big problem." It is not in his nature to pro-actively manage issues or preempt problems, she said.

¶11. (C) Brou says that one subject the president is passionately interested in is politics - particularly when it comes to comparing the intricacies and nuances of political theories and systems. When Poloff asked Brou if this interest extends to economic issues, Brou replied that the economy is only interesting to the president in how it relates to politics. Gbagbo's biggest concern at the moment, she said, is not the state of the economy, but how the

ComZone handover is going to be carried out.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Brou's depiction of the president as a "peace and zen" man is a far cry from the long-held view of the Ivoirian political class, who see President Gbagbo as a kind of Machiavellian puppetmaster continually plotting and orchestrating events behind the scenes. They would not accept Brou's contention that events seemingly ordered by the president are carried out without his knowledge. Opposition party leaders told Emboff, for example, that FANCI Chief of Staff General Mangou could never have ordered Anaky's arrest without first consulting Gbagbo or at least being sure that Gbagbo would support this action. These two views of the president, however, may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. If Gbagbo is as Brou describes, he could be using this hands-off approach as a calculated political ploy to distance himself from potential political minefields. END COMMENT

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